
atlantis in a nutshell for trumpet in Bb and trombone

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atlantis in a nutshell (for trumpet and trombone)

This piece was written with the lost city (and continent) of Atlantis as an inspiration. The reason I chose to call the piece “atlantis in a nutshell” is because the mythos around Atlantis as a lost city and continent is so enormous that writing a piece which relates to Atlantis just for trumpet and trombone seems to kind of squash all that mythos in a very small piece, in terms of duration and orchestration (as well as material).

For the pieces I used two kinds of material: two modes that I created (loosely) based on the Fibonacci sequence, and two melodies from Cretan songs.

The form of the pieces was inspired by composer Nicola LeFanu and what she said in a lecture I attended. She mentioned that in her pieces, the way she explores harmony is kind of circular (Fig.1). If the dot is the tonal centre in her harmony (but not tonal as in tonality, rather tonal as in a central tone around which the harmony is built), then the piece moves a bit away from that centre, then returns to it, then the second time it moves a bit further and returns to it, then the third time it moves even further etc, as if the tonal centre functions as a kind of gravity centre which pulls the rest of the piece's harmony towards it.



Figure 1: *Graphic representation of a tonal centre and the harmony of the piece moving away from it and returning to it.*

So, what I did in the piece is that I had an element that links the three movements (the note A, as it is absent from the two scales used in the first and second movement respectively, and the third movement is based highly on the note A) and then the two instruments play around that note but in a special way in each piece. In the following diagram, the point represents the linking element of the three movements, the inner circle represents the first movement, the outer circle represents the second movement and the partial parabolic line represents the third movement. The beginning of each of the first two movements is on the opposite side of the circle than the joining point, and the two instruments begin playing their own individual parts which are on the mode of the movement, and then they play individually until they reach about the middle of each movement, where they play an A is heard for the first time, and then the roles are loosely reversed, so what was played by one instrument in the beginning is now played by the other etc. In the case of the third movement, the instruments don't play the initial material of the other instrument reversely, but they do play them normally, so the piece kind of returns to the initial material but doesn't quite qualify for a circle, as it moves forward rather than going back in a way. Thus, I chose to represent that as a parabolic line

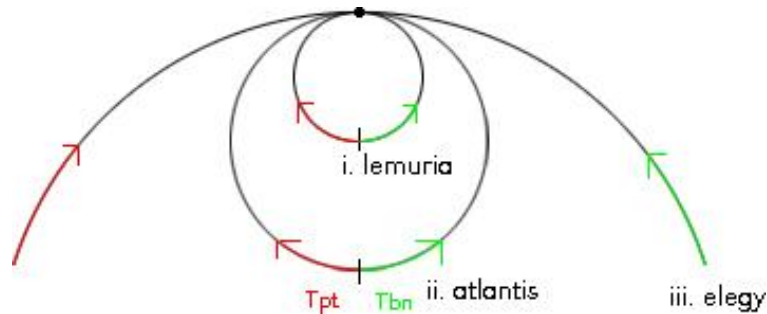


Figure 2: Graphic representation of the form of the three movements

I. lemuria

The first movement of the piece is called *Lemuria*. Lemuria is a “lost land” in the area of Indonesia and the Pacific Ocean. In the cosmology of H.P. Blavatsky (an occult author), in Lemuria lived the Third Root Race, which was much more undeveloped (mentally and physically) than the rest Root Races (and specifically the Fourth Root Race, which was the Root Race to inhibit Atlantis)¹.

This “undevelopedness” is presented in the music in two ways. Firstly, this movement has a frantic rhythm, without an evident pulse and just very “raw” material (most of the notes are semi-quavers), and secondly, the scale used for this first movement is explored in a raw way.

In terms of harmony, the piece is written around a mode I created by (loosely) using the Fibonacci sequence. I started on C and then moved one semitone upwards (marking the note), then one semitone above that (marking the note again), then two semitones, then three semitones, then five semitones etc (all 1, 1, 2, 3, 5 being numbers of the Fibonacci sequence). I continued like this until I had marked enough notes so I could form a mode out of them [Fig.3]

The scale has been used in a raw way, and also any processes on any fragments of the music were very raw, such as the inversion of measures 7-8 of the trumpet on measures 9-10 of the trombone (the initial fragment of music was copied as-is from the trumpet part onto the trombone part, not in terms of pitch but in terms of written notation, and it was bluntly inverted, no matter whether the resulting notes were notes of the mode used or not). So, some notes outside the mode may exist, but they are results of other, more "raw" processes in the music.

Then, up to measure 58, where an A is heard for the first time.

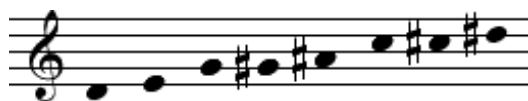


Figure 3: Resultant scale by moving in terms of the Fibonacci sequence downwards from C.s

1 Wikipedia. *Lemuria* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemuria_\(continent\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemuria_(continent)) as of 10th of December, 2007

II. atlantis

The second movement is called Atlantis. It is much more “civilised” than the first one, or rather more elegant, with the exploitation of the scale being more delicate than in the first movement. This movement is also more about the sound of the two instruments rather than harmony, melody, or counterpoint. Instead, there is a kind of “countercolor”, as the color/timbre of an instrument is set against the other. Various mutes have been used in both instruments, altering the sound of each “phrase” (the groups of notes in-between silences, rather).

In terms of harmony, this movement is again based on a scale which was formed using the Fibonacci sequence, but going downwards instead of upwards. The resultant scale was the following:



Figure 4: Resultant scale by moving in terms of the Fibonacci sequence downwards from C.

Speaking of form, this piece also has a kind of spiral form centred around the note A, which is absent in this mode as well. Up to measure 17 there has been no other instance of the note A, and after that note, the instruments play what the other instrument had been playing so far but reversed (but not in a way as raw as in the first movement – the trombone takes the trumpet part reversed in written pitch, and the trumpet takes the trombone part reversed but in concert pitch, so there is a kind of conflict between the two reversions).

III. elegy

The third and last movement of this piece is called “Elegy”, simply because it is like a “memory” of Atlantis (all we have now is a memory, we have no physical evidence of Atlantis' existence). In trying to present this memory I took two melodies from a Greek island, Creta, which, according to a theory by Mr. Angelos Galanopoulos who supports that there might have been an error in translation, possibly from Egyptian to Greek, and what may have been interpreted as “thousands” could actually be “hundreds”, so that would place Atlantis in the Minoan Crete in terms of dimensions and time.² Therefore, assuming one of the possible locations of Atlantis is Creta, those melodies would be like “souvenirs” of Atlantis. So, I took those two melodies which I found on sample recordings of the lyra on the internet, and transformed them in terms of tempo and pitch so that they sound a lot more elegiac and mournful than the original tunes, which sounded much more happy and joyful.





Figure 6: *The melody played by the lyra in the Cretan song Y.*

At bar 17, the two instruments change melodies; whereas the trumpet was playing the second melody, it is now playing the first melody, and vica versa for the trombone.

// Practical Performance Issues

As the piece wasn't performed in time for the submission of this analytical commentary of the piece, I can't quite state any performance issues as there weren't any. However, having worked with both players individually in the writing of the piece, I can hypothesise as of what performance issues may arise in the workshop of the piece.

Firstly, in the first movement, I speculate it is going to be difficult for the players to play synchronised and in tempo, as both passages are very difficult to perform even individually, and the movement is very fast. Secondly, measures 16 and 22 are going to be difficult to perform due to their peculiar nature (three plus six demi-semi-quavers) as opposed to the rest of the piece, which is usually counted in semi-quavers. Measure 17 is going to be tricky for the trumpet player to play in the right rhythm and the right pitch. Also the pitch might not be possible to be produced by the player, but that is going to be cleared up in the workshop that hasn't taken place yet. I thought there might be a bit of struggle for the trombone player in measures 40 and 55 to put in and out the straight mute respectively, so I deliberately wrote a fermata over the rest/note played by the trumpet, so the trombonist will have enough time to do that. A general problem with the first movement will be that of breathing, as there are very lengthy passages with continuous notes which will be difficult to perform on one breath. Lastly, the very last note of the movement is going to be quite difficult for the performers to get together, as it is very short and precise, and since the movement is quite fast, any slight mistake in terms of attack of that note will be heard.

In the second movement, the main difficulty the players will have, I think, is singing the fifths above the notes they are playing, with the mutes on.

Lastly, I don't think there should be any difficulties in the performance of the third movement, as it is not technically demanding or difficult in any way.